



Wee Learners(4 - 5 years): Outdoor Play With Loose Parts

We are going to explore how you can enhance outdoor play with loose parts. Inside classrooms and homes, there are often many toys to choose from. Most have a specific function. Outside, there may be more space but fewer toys. Children are naturally resourceful in their play outdoors. One stick can draw in the dirt or become a magic wand or stir a mug of freshly brewed mud coffee. Many sticks can be used for building a road or a log cabin. Children naturally gravitate toward nature's loose parts to build, gather, connect, take apart, design, create and play. Loose parts play outdoors can infuse a child's experience of nature.

If you are new to loose parts play, starting outside is one of the most simple and cost effective ways to go. Your children can help you search for and collect materials!

1. **Gathering the Goods:** Nature's loose parts are all around us. If not in your own yard, chances are you'll find them at a park or playground nearby. Water, dirt, sand, gravel and mud are also substances that can greatly enhance loose parts play outdoors.
2. **Add-ons from Indoors:** Recyclables and common household items can become great loose parts. A variety of containers are useful for filling, pouring, storing and transporting.
3. **Play!** You've gathered the troops. You've gathered the goods. Now you're ready to play!

As your children begin to use loose parts outside, you'll gain ideas of what might be added. Don't be afraid to get down and dirty with them—a curious adult encourages curious children!

Some Inspiration for how to play with loose parts:

Building and Constructing: Consider setting up a woodworking station. Scrap wood, small hammers and larger nails are great loose parts for inspiring budding builders. Adding in colorful yarn, rubber bands or zip ties offers opportunities to design and connect materials.

Texture and Color: Scraps of fabric, yarn and ribbon can inspire a variety of ways to explore with nature's loose parts. A dab of tacky glue can secure the ends of a yarn wrapped nature wand. Strands of ribbon and strips of fabric can be woven into a unique fallen branch or even a living tree or bush. Your scissor lover can cut yarn and ribbon to set out for birds who might be looking to build a nest nearby.

A Mud Kitchen: What child doesn't love to make mud pies and fairy salads? A collection of bowls, spoons, cups and tins are all the loose parts you will need. You've got dirt, just add water and rest assured that children are washable!

Sound: Every child is a musician at heart! A collection of interesting metal bowls, baking pans and spoons might at one time be used in the mud kitchen for making the perfect cake and at another time used as an outdoor percussion band!

Source: <https://bit.ly/2Up7JYu>

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